

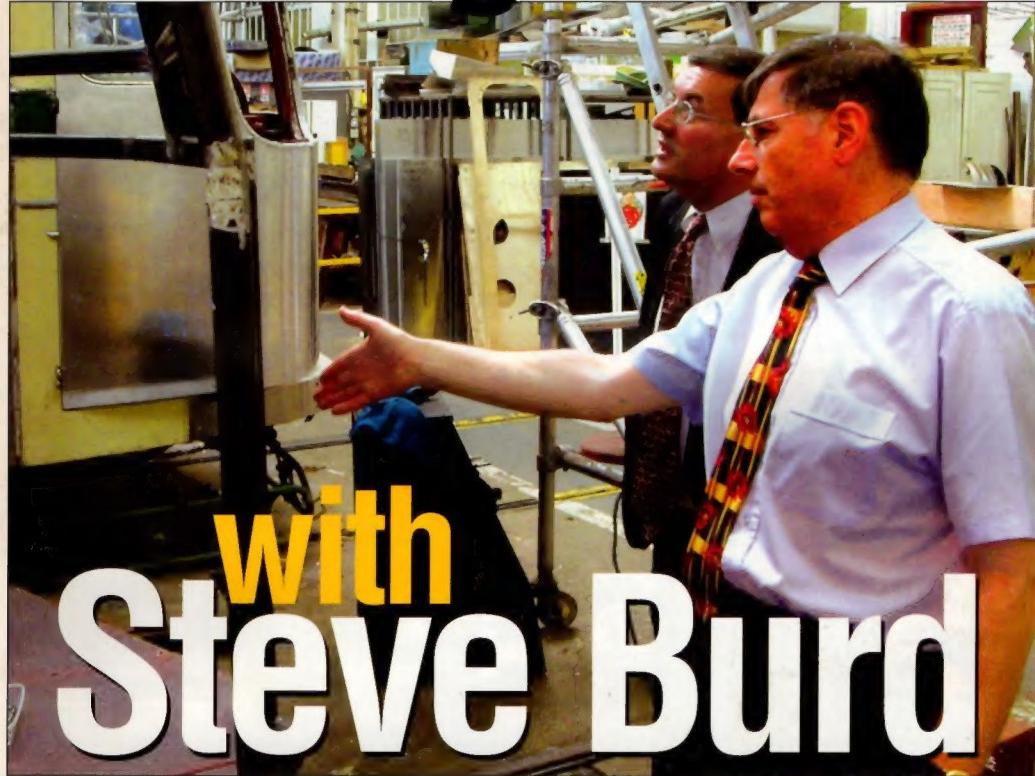
Issue 85

6 August
2004

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Walking the talk



with
Steve Burd

Enforced quality

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THIS ISSUE . . .



About turn

New transport strategy goes soft on targets.



On the road

EasyBus confirms start date for first route.



On display

Increased choice in destination equipment.



Danish delights

Arriva continues continental expansion.

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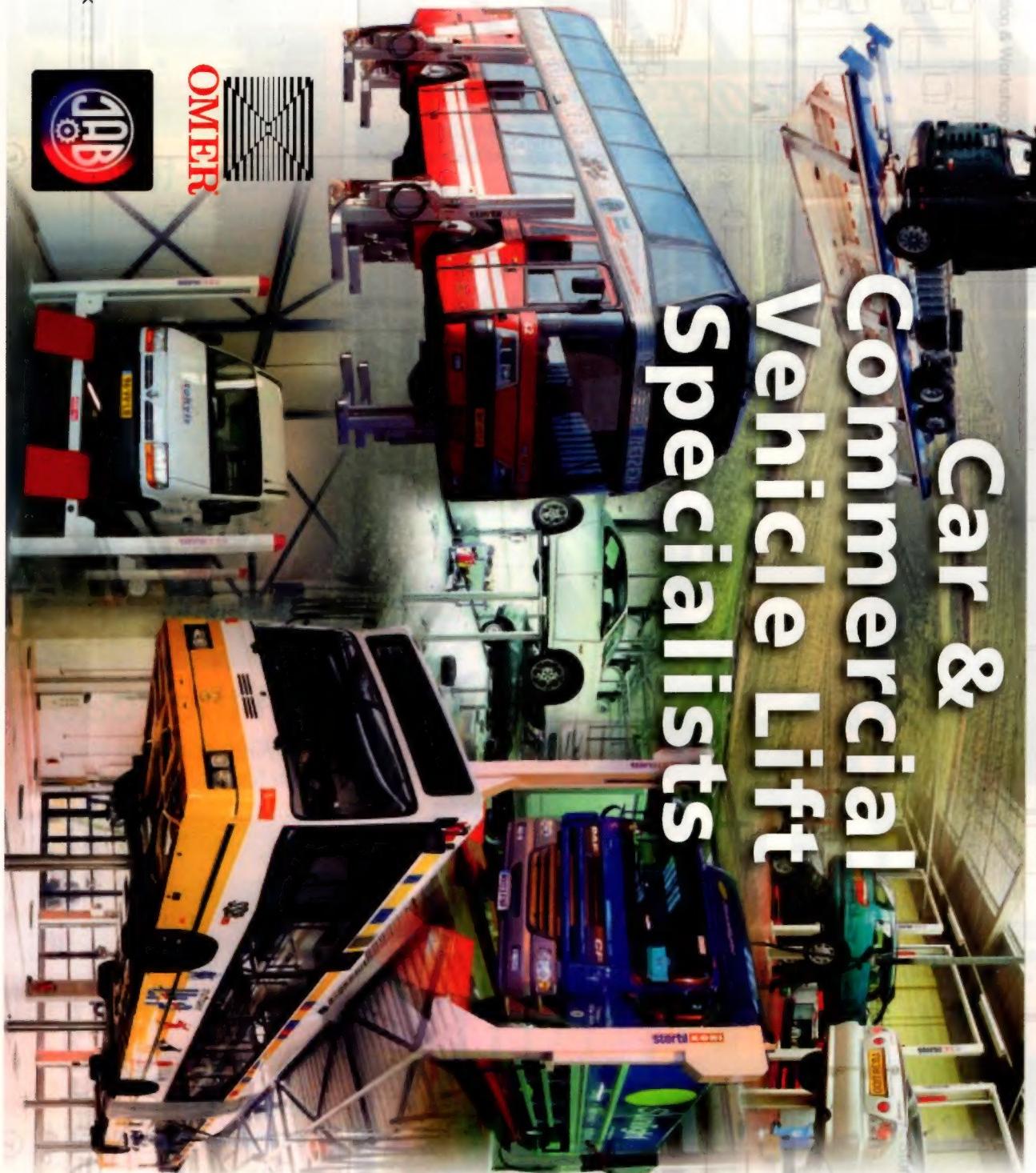


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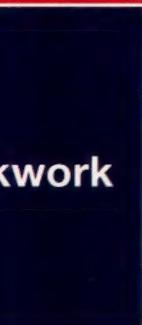
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Walking the talk
with Steve Burd
Enforced quality
Centro aims for first statutory partnership

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THE fortnightly *Bus and Coach Professional* gives you twice the value. More quality editorial and more sales opportunities. And backed by the industry's premier website - www.busandcoach.com - *Bus and Coach Professional* now leads the way for in-depth news coverage and analysis.

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Training is a vital component in ensuring the bus and coach industry has the skills it needs for the future. Steve Banner investigates.

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The Transport Act 2000 delivered legislation for the introduction of the Statutory Quality Bus Partnership. Four years later, as Peter Plisner reports, a transport authority in the midlands is about to become the first in the UK to use the new powers.

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Every care is taken over the accuracy of material in *Bus and Coach Professional* but the publishers cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. Views and opinions of contributors to *Bus and Coach Professional* are not necessarily those of the publishers who cannot accept responsibility for such contributions.

Letters and articles may be submitted and should be sent to the editor at the address above.

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Comment



THE loss of bus priority measures because of local opposition is nothing new. But the Birmingham case reported in this issue raises a number of interesting points.

The battle, it seems, is between the local authority and local pressure groups regarding the impact of proposed priority measures on the environment. Now, those who are active protecting trees and other parts of the natural environment would normally be seen as friends of the bus as well as friends of the earth.

The opposition in this case may be well founded of course. And the actions of the local authority cabinet member may well be at odds with partnership working as TWM asserts.

But beyond this local dispute, the challenge for the industry is to build alliances with all friends of the bus and avoid alienating such groups by consulting early about plans and getting all the key players on side.

There are enough enemies of the bus around already without creating any more.

IT'S a car club, but not as we know it. Metro is linking up with a new car club in Leeds, WhizzGo, to offer local people access to a car when they need it alongside discounts on travel throughout West Yorkshire.

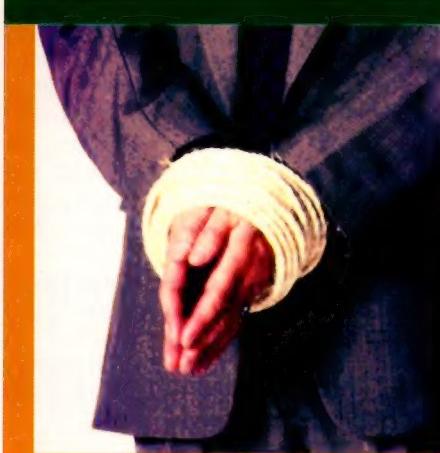
It's the kind of innovation that matches the public's aspirations for choice in their mode of transport whilst reducing the overall impact of the car, particularly in urban areas.

The cost of motoring may be falling in the official statistics, but that is not necessarily the car owner's perception. For the city dweller the costs of parking, congestion and time wasted may make car ownership a finely balanced decision.

So, enter car clubs. You can use a car when you need, but you don't have the hassle of parking it or feeling obliged to use it when public transport, or heaven forbid, walking may be a better option. Build in savings on public transport for registered members and you surely have a winning combination.

Of course there's nothing to stop bus companies taking the lead on such car club schemes themselves. There is certainly one entrepreneur about to set out in his orange minibuses that may be interested. It is only hoped that the bus industry's indigenous entrepreneurs are also up to the challenge.

steve.rooney@busandcoach.com



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B NEWS BRIEFS

Nottingham City Transport increased its fares this week. The maximum city fare of £1.10 remains unchanged, but shorter journey fares - previously 60p and 90p - have each gone up by 10p. ■

Warrington Borough Transport, which took six Volvo-supplied Merit midibuses in 2003, has just added a further six to its fleet. The Merit is a joint VDL Bus/Wrightbus product, marketed in the UK by Volvo Bus. ■

Following the fatal school bus crash in South Wales in 2002, **Vale of Glamorgan** council has introduced new rules for school contracts which do away with the three-for-two rule and also prohibit the carriage of standing passengers. In extreme cases of misbehaviour the council would use anti-social behaviour orders to ban children from school buses. ■

The European Commission, DG Energy and Transport, is offering a training programme for **urban transport professionals**. The training is targeted at mid-career managers and executives working in local/regional authorities or for public transport operators in EU Member States and Applicant countries and takes place in four sessions in Brussels, Prague, Parma and Rotterdam in the first half of 2005. Details at www.transport-training.org. ■

Local bus services in Slough operated by Nightingale's ceased at the end of July. Replacements are being provided by First Beeline. ■

Market Prices

	Price	High	Low
Arriva	421	421	339
FirstGroup	285	307	250
Go-Ahead	1087	1285	835
National Exp.	686	728	559
Stagecoach	86	97	67
Southern Vectis	43	44	28
2 Travel	4	11	4
Tellings	130	176	73

UK closing prices 2/08/04 plus 12 month high and low.

South Yorks strike continues after offer rejected

THE TWO-week-old strike by 1,500 bus drivers at First South Yorkshire - the longest all-out strike in the bus industry for many years - is continuing after drivers voted on Monday to reject the company's latest pay offer. The new offer included a 30p an hour rise, backdated to April, and would have provided increases in rates of pay of between 7.6 and 9.7 per cent over the next two years.

The company's managing director, Gary Nolan, says: "We are disappointed that this latest pay offer has been rejected, despite meeting the main request

for the increase to be backdated to April 2004. I regret that this continued strike action being undertaken by T&GWU has caused such inconvenience to our customers and would like to assure them we will continue to do our utmost to resolve this dispute."

The company had hoped that acceptance of the offer would have seen buses back on the road on Tuesday 3 August.

To help travellers the South Yorkshire PTE is listing on its website alternative bus services run by other operators.

■ www.firstgroup.com
www.sypte.co.uk



■ **First South Yorkshire** strike into third week following new ballot.

Birmingham showcase hit by environmental concerns

PLANS FOR a Showcase route in Birmingham have in part been abandoned after local people expressed concern that its construction would lead to the felling of trees at Acocks Green. Local residents and Friends of the Earth raised questions about what they saw as environmentally-damaging aspects of plans to upgrade the Outer Circle service.

Birmingham city council cabinet member Len Gregory says: "Because of the strength of public opinion, I have now decided that plans for a bus lane on School Road, Hall Green, will be dropped. The plans that would have seriously affected The Green in Acocks Green, a much-loved local facility, are now redundant."

Major local operator Travel

West Midlands has expressed disappointment at the decision. "We would have liked some opportunity to discuss the developments with Councillor Gregory before he made his final decision," says TWM corporate affairs director Phil Bateman. "Partnership working implies that there is some degree of agreement before schemes or parts of schemes are axed."

20 per cent increase in pre tax profits for NatEx

NATIONAL EXPRESS Group showed a significant rise in profits on a small increase in turnover in its preliminary results for the six months to 30 June. Turnover was £1,266.7million (2003: £1,258.8million) while pre-tax profits were £47.9million (£40.2million), an increase of almost 20 per cent.

The group notes a good performance from Travel West

Midlands on the strength of continuing investment, and six per cent passenger growth on its coach services.

Chairman David Ross says: "Our coach business has started the year well and we are optimistic for the full year as the division enters its peak trading period. The increase in patronage and improved financial performance of this division

was encouraging. This was generated by our focus on the customer and adoption of customer-driven pricing strategies

"We were pleased with the solid performance of our UK Bus division. We are also planning to implement a number of initiatives to attract further growth."

■ www.nationalexpressgroup.com

Car club links to public transport

A NEW car club, WhizzGo, was launched in Leeds last week. It is the first commercial car club in the UK to be integrated into a city-wide transport network. As well as having access to a new car without the expense of owning one, WhizzGo members get discounts on public transport in West Yorkshire, through a partnership with Metro, the West Yorkshire PTE.

Drivers who join WhizzGo, get access to a new car at rates from £3.95 an hour, including petrol, mileage, road tax, insurance, servicing, breakdown, recovery, maintenance and cleaning.

However the basic rate is £4.95 for one hour and ten miles, with each extra mile being charged at 20p.

In addition, members are eligible for a 15 per cent reduction on the cost of an annual MetroCard, which can be used on buses and trains across West Yorkshire. To promote the scheme, the first 50 members are also being given free one-month MetroCards, worth £77.

WhizzGo says that a car club in Leeds make sense for the growing number of city centre residents who have parking problems, but who also have many

amenities on hand and have easy access to public transport.

Experience in the United States and continental Europe suggests that for every driver who joins an organisation like WhizzGo, up to 10 cars are taken off congested roads, and club members complement their car usage with increased use of public transport.

WhizzGo plans to have almost 100 cars available for 2,500 members in Leeds by 2006. An on-board computer restricts entry to members holding a smartcard who have booked the car.

■ www.WhizzGo.co.uk

EasyBus sets start date for Milton Keynes

EASYBUS starts operations in two weeks' time with the launch on 19 August of its first service, running between Hendon Central, in north London, to Milton Keynes. Fares start at £1. Hendon Central is on the Northern line, giving easy Underground connections to central London and is further north than the original planned terminus at Brent Cross, which should reduce traffic delays.

The company is starting up with ten 16-seat Mercedes-Benz Sprinters, which are being operated on its behalf by MK Metro. Fares include one piece of hand luggage, but passengers with suitcases have to book additional seats for them.

EasyBus is offering nine departures a day, with an end-to-end journey time of 1 hour 5 minutes for the 45-mile trip.



EasyGroup chairman Stelios Haji-Ioannou aims to compete with rail links with his Milton Keynes-Hendon service.

"Watch out Richard Branson," is the warning from Stelios Haji-Ioannou, EasyGroup chairman. "I am now going to offer con-

sumers a cheaper service than your trains which will also run on time. EasyBus will start by linking Milton Keynes with north London but will then serve more and more towns along the M1 corridor, competing with Virgin trains as well as other train services, buses and cars."

The company - which originally planned a London to Birmingham service - is now saying that the next stage of its expansion will be services from Hendon to Luton Airport, followed by other towns on the M1 corridor and in the northern home counties.

EasyBus is focused on on-line booking but, unlike Stagecoach's Megabus internet brand, the drivers on EasyBus services will accept cash fares if capacity is available on their vehicles. The Hendon to Milton Keynes cash fare will be £5.

www.easybus.co.uk

B NEWS BRIEFS

The Driving Standards Agency proposes to raise the fee for the practical test for PCV drivers from £76 to £80 from 8 November. The fee was last increased in 2001. A consultation document outlining this and other test fee increases can be viewed on the DSA website, www.dsa.gov.uk. The consultation closes on 24 September. ■

By reducing off-peak single fares on route 99 to a maximum of 99p - offering a saving of up to 76p - Arriva Midlands carried 2,000 extra passengers on the service in June. The 99 runs between Nottingham and Loughborough. ■

First London has secured ISO9001 accreditation for all of its bus depots both in London and in Berkshire. The company's former CentreWest depots achieved the standard in 1996, but the others, previously part of Capital Citybus or Beeline, have been certificated over the last 18 months. ■

Swindon is the latest place to offer timetable information using text messages to mobile phones. The scheme will cover services in the town operated by Thamesdown Transport and Stagecoach, with users sending a seven-digit bus stop number as a text message and receiving scheduled departure times in return. The service is to start next month. ■

A 20-year-old Tiverton man has been arrested and released on bail following a suspected arson attack on the top deck of a Stagecoach bus in the town. ■

UK diesel price update

pence per litre

Northern Ireland	82.9
Scotland	81.6
Scotland - remote areas	84.9
Wales	82.2
Northern England	81.7
Midlands and East Anglia	81.9
Southern England	82.0
UK garage average	82.0
Supermarket average	80.1

Retail price sample from garages in main population centres.

Source: AA

'Weak' councils back in the funds

THE FOUR local authorities whose poor performance led to them having transport funding withheld have taken enough positive steps towards improvement to qualify for the capital funds, transport minister Tony McNulty has announced.

Thurrock, East Sussex, Plymouth and Southend-on-Sea all scored a 'weak' rating in last December's local transport

settlement and each had 5 or 10 per cent of their allocations withheld, until they could demonstrate how they intended to improve.

McNulty also signalled that other local authorities whose performances were not up to scratch could face similar penalties in this year's settlement, but that it will not be a certainty that withheld funding will automatically

be awarded on improvement.

He said: "I am very encouraged to see that the authorities we assessed as 'weak' have taken such a positive approach to improvement. We are not in the business of naming and shaming but their poor showing last year has clearly provided the stimulus to take some necessary action."

www.dft.gov.uk

Need the final piece in your fuelling jigsaw?

B NEWS BRIEFS

Arriva Yorkshire is now offering free travel to police officers and special constables in North Yorkshire, both on and off duty, on production of a current warrant card. Says Arriva Yorkshire commercial director Phil Booker: "We hope that knowing the customer next to them could be a police officer will offer an added sense of security to the majority of customers - and act as a deterrent to the minority who would seek to misbehave or cause problems for others." ■

Arriva North West has extended its Le Bus branding in Liverpool to four more services in the city. The Le Bus brand is operated by low-floor vehicles equipped with CCTV, and was launched in January. The company has also introduced a new Liverpool Arriva Day Ticket, offering unlimited travel for £2.80. ■

Cardiff Bus was selected Bus Operator of the Year in the National Transport Awards run by the Centre for Transport Policy at The Robert Gordon University. Stagecoach won the Most Innovative Transport Project award for its new Megabus operation. ■

Greenpower Technologies claims that trials by truck operators of a new electronically-controlled LPG/diesel conversion show a 22 per cent saving in fuel costs. For more details www.greenpowertechnologies.com ■

European diesel price update

	pence per litre equivalent
Austria	52.62
Belgium	55.29
Czech Rep	54.47
Denmark	67.37
Estonia	45.95
Finland	56.62
France	57.28
Germany	59.28
Greece	49.29
Netherlands	58.58
Hungary	65.58
Ireland	61.28
Italy	62.58
Luxembourg	45.93
Norway	67.91
Poland	50.49
Portugal	51.92
Spain	57.84
Sweden	62.70
Switzerland	64.91

Source: AA

Government crackdown on tacho cheats

THE GOVERNMENT is proposing to give the police and VOSA powers to issue fixed penalty notices to coach drivers for a range of offences including overloading, exhaust emissions, drivers' hours and tachograph infringements, and vehicle excise duty irregularities. The plans are outlined in 'Consultation on the introduction of a Graduated Fixed Penalty and Deposit Scheme'.

It is also planning tougher tachograph enforcement including powers to require drivers to take their vehicles to a place where there is equipment to check for unauthorised devices, faulty calibration or other tampering. This power would be used only where there was evidence that the tachograph was not functioning properly and where it was not possible to establish the cause of the malfunction at the roadside.

And it is proposed to make it a specific offence to supply

devices designed to enable the falsification, suppression, manipulation or destruction of tachograph data, or to provide confidential information to unauthorised persons which would assist in creating such devices.

This is seen as particularly important with the introduction of digital tachographs where tampering is more likely to be with the aid of complex equipment than would be the case with the analogue tachographs.

Higher fines are in the pipeline too. The maximum penalty for failing to produce tachograph records or for obstructing an officer in the exercise of his powers would rise from £1,000 to £5,000.

The police and VOSA are also concerned that a number of operators are escaping punishment for conniving in falsification of records. They say that in the last year 350 coach and truck drivers were convicted of 1,615 false record

offences, while only six operators were convicted of offences relating to false records. To address this it plans to supplement the offence of "causing" falsification with an offence of "deliberately permitting" records to be falsified. Such an offence would be proved by showing a consistent pattern of false records by one or more of the drivers in a fleet and would also carry a maximum £5,000 fine.

In parallel with these changes there will be tougher enforcement of the rules for foreign drivers, who would have to pay on the spot the maximum fine for any offence they were alleged to have committed. Drivers would still have the option of going to court, and if cleared of the charge would have their spot fine refunded.

The consultation paper is available on the DfT website at www.dft.gov.uk and the closing date for responses is 14 October.

Overground branding introduced in Manchester

FIRST'S OVERGROUND brand has been introduced to Greater Manchester, on three existing high-frequency services in Oldham, and one in Bolton. This marks a change in tactic from the original Overground concept which elsewhere has been launched as a network, rather than being used to create a new image on existing routes. Further Overground-branded routes are on the way.

"The carefully managed roll out of Overground will enable us to deliver additional benefits for customers and help us to fulfil our promises in respect of improving services," says Russell Gard, First's regional



New Overground branding on three Manchester routes.

commercial director. "It makes using the bus simple and easy, and combined with our range of unlimited travel tickets such as FirstDay and FirstWeek, provides a real alternative for

car users."

Dedicated vehicles with colour-coded route branding and improved passenger information are used on the services.

www.firstgroup.com

First says Norwich operation is improving

STANDARDS ON First Eastern Counties in Norwich are on the rise, according to the company's latest 'mystery shopper' survey, conducted during May and June. Scores were up on all six areas rated by the survey, compared with figures produced at the end of 2003 when the company was facing strong local criticism for its performance.

For customer service the percentage rating it either good or very good was up 12 points to 76 (2003: 64). Other areas showing improvements were driver appearance at 85 per cent (2003: 77 per cent); driving standards at 86 per cent (2003: 71 per cent) and exterior vehicle condition at 87 per cent (2003: 70 per cent).

John Pope, managing director of First Eastern Counties, says: "The results are very encouraging. It shows that we have been listening to our customers and that our significant investments in new vehicles, driver training and a dedicated customer service centre have improved the service we provide."

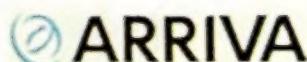
www.firstgroup.com

£10million aquisition boosts Arriva in Denmark

ARRIVA HAS expanded in Denmark with the purchase of Wulff Bus, which employs 600 people and operates 300 vehicles in Jutland. The deal is worth £10.3million.

Last year the Wulff business made a £2.2million operating profit on a turnover of £23.6million.

Bob Davies, Arriva's chief executive, says: "Wulff's bus operations in Jutland and Copenha-



gen have a strong geographic fit with our existing business. This acquisition provides an excellent opportunity to deliver increased

service efficiency and quality. In Jutland we will be able to focus on developing greater integration of public transport."

Arriva has been in Denmark since 1997 and is now the country's biggest bus operator with a market share of around 33 per cent, rising to 40 per cent in the Greater Copenhagen area. It also has two rail franchises in Jutland.

i www.arriva.co.uk

Hybrid trial for Stagecoach

STAGECOACH THIS month starts trials in various parts of England of its Designline diesel-electric hybrid bus, built in New Zealand. The vehicle was brought to Britain as part of the company's successful bid to operate hybrids on a Nexus-sponsored riverside service in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The bus starts a two-week trial in Cumbria next week, and then later in the month will spend two weeks in Coventry and Leamington. In September and October it will spend a fortnight in Oxford, and then a further two weeks in Winchester.

The hybrid is a 30-seat, 60-passenger bus and nine are on order for the Tyneside operation, scheduled to start next summer.

Les Warneford, managing director of Stagecoach UK Bus, says: "The hybrid electric bus has real potential to improve the

quality of life in our towns and cities and is further evidence of Stagecoach's commitment to minimising the impact of our operations on the environment.

"We have already operated this technology successfully in New Zealand and we look forward to demonstrating its benefits to local authorities across the country."

The hybrid trial comes as Stagecoach continues the commercial evaluation of a fuel additive that could transform the environmental and operational performance of buses across the UK.

The group signed an agreement with Cerulean International last year to trial the product in up to 1,000 of its vehicles. Initial trials of the nanocatalyst technology in the north-west of England have pointed to a 5 per cent fuel consumption reduction.

Bus crime seminar

A ONE-DAY conference, Fighting bus crime, is being held in Liverpool on 2 November. It aims to share experiences and information on practical measures to tackle bus crime and is organised by the Department for Transport's safer travel on buses and coaches panel (STOP).

Neil Scales, chief executive of Merseytravel, will chair the event. Speakers will include transport minister Tony McNulty.

The delegate rate is £50, including lunch, and the event is being held at the Foresight Centre, University of Liverpool. For details and reservations contact Nathan Cole on 020 7944 2297.

i www.dft.gov.uk

NEWS BRIEFS

A change of control at Redditch council will see the reintroduction of free bus travel for elderly people. A 30p flat fare was introduced at the start of July by the Liberal and Conservative groups on the council. However Labour have regained control of the council and plan to scrap the 30p fare from 23 December. ■

ROSCO is holding a one-day safety workshop at the Warwick offices of Volvo Truck & Bus on Tuesday 12 October with speakers addressing topics which includes speeding, drug use, driver selection and terrorism. The fee is £75 plus VAT for ROSCO members or £125 plus VAT for non-members. Details from 01865 775552. ■

Pete's Travel has been replaced by Stagecoach on two Warwickshire county tendered services after just over three months operation, allegedly because of poor performance and passenger complaints. ■

The second London Transport Awards, organised by the Centre for Transport Policy at The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen have been announced and have the support of London mayor Ken Livingston. Entries close on 24 September and the awards will be made in March 2005. See www.abs.ac.uk/cftp for details. ■

GoSkills is inviting tenders to carry out research in Wales which will address the demand for and supply of skills, training and qualifications from the transport sector. Tenders have to be submitted by 27 August and details are on the GoSkills website, www.transfed.org. ■

First Eastern Counties has reduced the price of its Norwich City weekly ticket from £8.50 to £5, as part of a summer promotion. The new fare started this week, and comes as the company is facing increased competition from smaller operators Konectbus and Anglian Coaches. ■



The government's transport strategy document represents a distinct about turn from the ambitious proposals put forward by John Prescott in Labour's previous term of office. **Bus and Coach Professional**

assesses the plan and summarises initial reactions from the media and interested parties.



Re-writing the PLAN

The David Begg view

"How many [local authorities] are really going to introduce congestion charging so that they can get ownership of their local bus services? How many will replace expensive and under-used regional rail services with more flexible bus services?" - David Begg, chairman of the Commission for Integrated Transport, writing in the Financial Times.

The TGWU view

"Buses are the best and quickest way to deliver improvements in public transport use. They are a win-win situation for local authorities to have a much more focussed and robust say in local routes planning and fare levels." - Jack Dromey, deputy general secretary.

The PTEG view

"We are delighted that the government plans to give city region transport authorities stronger powers over bus and rail. This will help us to deliver the integrated public transport networks that our passengers want, and which equivalent European cities take for granted." - Kieran Preston, PTEG chairman.

REMEMBER back in 2000 The Great Idea in the government's transport white paper of transforming the humble bus from workhorse to racehorse? Well, to continue the equine analogy, it looks at first glance as though we have just seen the unfortunate nag being led off to the knacker's yard.

If the 2000 White Paper, setting out an ambitious 10-year transport plan, aimed too high, the 2004 version is grounded in the harsh reality of the world in which we live. A world where the government caved in under pressure from fuel protestors and instead of working to curb car use has given in to the motoring lobby.

But it's far from being all bad news, and Alistair Darling's new transport strategy document, *The Future of Transport - a*

network for 2030, drew a positive response from a wide range of sources including CPT, PTEG and the TGWU.

In public transport his main critic has been the Greater Manchester PTE, angered by the lack of support for planned extensions to Metrolink. The Leeds Supertram has also lost government support, although Metro, the West Yorkshire PTE, sees the way forward being a revised project, rather than a fight over funding with the government.

Metro chairman Stanley King says: "I am confident that in September we will be in a position to go back to the Department for Transport with a new proposal that achieves the cost reductions Alistair Darling requires."

The third light rail scheme

to get the thumbs down from Darling is South Hampshire.

The signs are that the government has woken up to the fact that, impressive as they are, trams are expensive. The £560million which Greater Manchester wants would be enough to replace the region's entire bus fleet - three times over.

So, what we now appear to have is a new and genuine acceptance that buses really are important, and that with operators and local authorities working in partnership buses can make a difference.

The new strategy document says: "We must realise the full potential of buses to improve local transport provision in towns, cities and rural areas across the country. The government's role is to

In Greater Manchester the PTE favours Metrolink expansion, although bus services could be improved for a fraction of the cost.

provide the right framework for local transport authorities and operators to deliver better services. Working within this framework, authorities must adopt the right approach for local circumstances."

Quality contracts are one way forward: "Most areas will be best served by continuing with the current partnership arrangements but we want some local authorities to consider more radical options. We want to encourage greater scope for local transport authorities to determine routes, fares, quality standards and frequency of services in specified circumstances as part of an integrated transport plan."

Those 'specified circumstances' could be the introduction of congestion charging, or the use of buses to replace lightly-used rail services in PTE areas - an issue sure to rouse the rail lobby to action.

The document continues: "Where a scheme includes a quality contract, the local authority needs to demonstrate that this is the only practical way of delivering its bus strategy. An authority wishing to implement measures to reduce congestion without reducing accessibility may need a quality contract in order to guarantee a network



of affordable, frequent, bus services." The government is to amend its guidance on quality contracts to reflect this.

Changed legislation is promised to speed the introduction of Quality Contracts and to ensure that co-ordination arrangements which are designed to benefit passengers are not blocked by the OFT.

The PTEs will also be given powers to buy buses for lease to operators, as already happens in a number of shire counties.

Bus Service Operators Grant has survived - but not in its entirety. Where Quality Contracts are implemented, the money currently paid to operators through BSOG will instead be channelled through the local authority. Similar arrangements are to be set up for London's tendered network.

It looks as though more funding will be made available

for Kickstart projects, aimed at pump-priming patronage growth, in the light of progress with the 18 pilot schemes currently being funded. And Rural Bus Subsidy Grant will be retained beyond April 2006 to give continuing support to local authorities in promoting rural accessibility.

Coaches were not forgotten in the review, and the government wants to see proposals for the introduction of inter-urban coach services from the South East Regional Assembly.

In fairness, much has been achieved by the government over the last four years, and by setting expectations so high, the John Prescott document in 2000 has done the government a disservice.

Darling's fresh approach holds more realistic promise.

i www.dft.gov.uk/strategy/futureoftransport

The CPT view

"He [Alistair Darling] has shown commitment to the bus and, most importantly, clarity of vision. He clearly stated what we have known all along; most areas are best served by Quality Partnerships. We are also pleased that he has clarified the government's position on Quality Contracts. The fact that, other than for rail substitutions, the tests laid down in the Transport Act 2000 remain unaltered, sends a clear and welcome message."

- Brian Nimick, director general

What the papers said...

The Independent

"The government has abandoned targets set in the Prescott [2000 White Paper]... The government had already conceded it would not meet its objective of reducing congestion by 2010 to levels below that of 2000."

Daily Express

"Shadow transport secretary Tim Yeo said public transport would have to improve first and the [road-user] charge used to fund a better and bigger road system."

The Sun

"Motorists could pay more than £1 a mile under government plans for road charges to beat traffic jams."

The Daily Telegraph

"Traffic congestion will worsen relentlessly for at least 10 years until a nationwide system of road charging becomes technically feasible, ministers said yesterday."

Financial Times

"The white paper reiterated the message from recent announcements that the government favours improved bus provision over more expensive heavy and light rail alternatives."

The Guardian

"John Prescott's £180 billion 10-year plan to create an 'integrated' transport infrastructure was yesterday consigned to the dustbin."

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CANADA

A BUS Rapid Transit system is to start in the York region of Greater Toronto in the autumn of 2005, using 77 vehicles supplied by Van Hool - 22 artics and 55 12m models. The vehicles will

COACHQUOTE.COM, which provides an on-line group-booking service for coach operators in the USA, is extending its activities north of the border to Canada, working in partnership with trade association Motor Coach Canada. CoachQuote.com was set up in 2000, and in 2001 formed a link with US trade body the American Bus Association. The company says that last year its website generated coach business worth over \$19million (£15million) and that it received an average of 100 private hire requests every day.

be fitted with equipment from INIT which incorporates GPS linked to real-time information at 122 new bus shelters. The INIT equipment also provides traffic signal priority and automatic passenger counting. The service is to operate 20 hours a day with vehicles arriving every 5 to 10 minutes during peak periods. By 2006, the BRT system is expected to have switched over 7,000 trips a day from cars to public transport and increase ridership in the rapid transit corridors by 30 per cent.

I www.yorkinmotion.com.

USA

CONNEX has secured a \$21.9million (£16million) five-year contract to operate bus services in Austin, Texas, on behalf of the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Connex will use Capital Metro's vehicles to provide a range of services including park-and-ride, two express routes and various suburban and downtown local services.

ITALY

SCANIA has secured its largest-ever city bus order in Italy, which calls for 52 OmniCitys for ACTV in Venice. "This is a prestigious order that further

strengthens our position in the Italian city bus market," says Henry Jonsson, managing director of Scania Bus Italy. "Four years ago, we began a successful breakthrough in the Italian city bus market with the OmniCity. Since then we have sold more than 300." ACTV operates 600 buses - and some canal boats - and its OmniCitys will be delivered later this year.

USA

MAJOR cutbacks by Greyhound have created opportunities for smaller operators, and Jefferson Lines of Minneapolis is taking on two routes from that city to Grand Forks, North Dakota (380 miles), and Sioux Falls, South Dakota (290 miles). It will receive a \$153,000 (£120,000) federal grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation to cover operating costs to the end of this year. Weekly ridership figures are interesting - around 300 on the Grand Forks service and just 200 on the Sioux Falls route.

KANSAS CITY area commuters are to get an improved bus service following a \$7.4million (£6million) grant for a 9.7-mile bus rapid transit system and 33 new buses from the Federal Transit Administration. US secretary of transportation, Norman Y Mineta, says: "Bus rapid transit gives communities an affordable transit alternative that provides swift, more user-friendly public transportation. The Bush Administration has invested in this new system, which connects workers to jobs, shoppers to stores, and Kansas City area residents to the rapidly expanding economy."

The new Solo - now shorter, longer



With an entrance step lower than any other bus on the road, the Solo is designed for accessibility and real passenger appeal. But where operators were once limited in their choice of low floor vehicles, the Solo now comes in a range of lengths between 7.8 and 10.2 metres, seating between 24 and 37 passengers. Plus there's now the new SlimLine Solo - a 'narrow body' version that offers passengers and operators all the advantages of the full size Solo, but saves 130mm in the overall width.



OPTIMA Bus Corporation, which builds the Wrightbus-developed Opus urban bus, has secured an order for 11 vehicles from Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority in Texas, bringing the Authority's Opus fleet to 28 vehicles. And in South Carolina, Clemson Area Transit has ordered nine Opuses, taking its fleet of the type to 20.



THE FIRST of 300 Mercedes-Benz Citaro buses ATAC of Rome has been handed over. ATAC operates 2,700 buses, and when all of the Citaros are delivered by the end of this year there will be 500 Mercedes in the fleet. The Citaros

USA

LOS ANGELES County Metropolitan Transportation Authority has ordered a further 75 NABI 40ft-long CNG-powered 40-LFW buses for delivery early next year. The order is worth around \$25million (£20million) and is to help fulfil a court order made last year which required the MTA to put 145 extra buses in service. They will bring to 875 the number of NABI buses in the operator's 2,350-strong fleet.

POLAND



POLISH BUS builder Solaris produced 188 buses in the first six months of 2004 and has orders for a further 312 to be delivered before the end of the year. New orders include 63 low-floor buses for Riga, Latvia, and 55 Urbino 12 vehicles for Kaunas, Lithuania. The company is also supplying

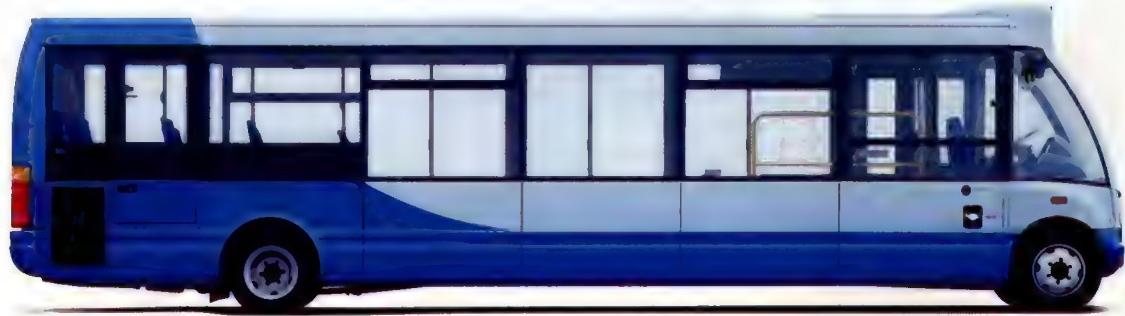


trolleybuses to the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. In Western Europe it has secured business in France, Germany and Switzerland. A low-entry bus is to be launched at the IAA show in Hanover next month.

ITALY

are of three-door layout and are CRT-equipped to provide even lower emissions than are set by Euro 3. This is one of Mercedes' biggest-ever orders from an Italian bus operator.

er and narrower



The SlimLine Solo is already proving popular in areas where larger buses have difficulties servicing routes with access problems. The new longer variant, with its higher payload, is also winning acclaim on higher density operations.

So, however long or wide you need your Solo to be, you know that it'll measure up per-

OPTARE

Fuel savings with novel partnership

ARRIVA HAS signed a five year agreement with BP with the aim of joint working to reduce its use of fuels and lubricants through a comprehensive purchasing and management efficiency programme.

The new initiative, which is being implemented across Arriva's UK bus fleet, is expected to achieve cost savings to Arriva of around £5 million after costs have been recovered over the duration of the contract. Through the significant reductions in fuel usage, this partnership will also provide environmental benefits with reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of approximately 145 kilotons over 5 years.

"This exciting new partnership agreement fits perfectly with Arriva's strategy of implementing initiatives to provide both business and environmental improvements, and we are delighted to be working with BP to achieve this goal," says Steve Clayton, managing director of Arriva's UK bus division. "We are committed to reducing



Arriva is working in partnership with BP to cut costs and reduce emissions.

the levels of harmful emissions being released into the environment through the effective selection, maintenance and fuelling of our vehicles, and by the utilisation of the best available technology."

Under the so-called 'gain-share' agreement, Arriva will use advanced synthetic lubricants to help achieve fuel savings and provide enhanced protection to its vehicle's engines. In addition, the two companies will work together to standardise Arriva's existing data capture procedure to enable all fuelling activities to be effectively monitored. This process will also be integrated into

the company's new accounting system to further optimise the fuel and lubricant management process.

In the UK, Arriva's bus fleet consumes almost 160 million litres of diesel each year. With the implementation of this partnership initiative, it is expected that fuel consumption will reduce by seven per cent, generating an annual saving of £2 million before costs. As a direct result of this reduced fuel consumption, there will be an associated reduction in pollutants entering the atmosphere, with CO₂ emissions reducing by more than 29 kilotons a year.

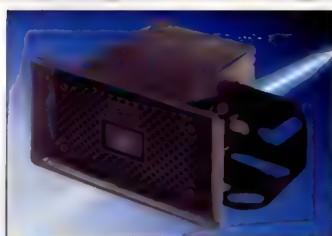
New reversing warning system from Brigade

BRIGADE ELECTRONICS has introduced a new Backalarm reversing and warning system which includes fixed volume, self-adjusting, constant tone, dual function and bbs-tek broadband sound models.

Brigade says the benefits of the new system include improved reliability, increased accuracy in sound levels, quicker and more accurate adjustments to ambient sound levels, easier installation and overall a longer life thanks to a superior build quality and robust nature.

"Pricing is all important in the Backalarm market," says Brigade Electronics managing director Philip Hanson-Abbott. "Technological advances and economies of scale have yielded major price reduction in certain fast-moving models. Our customers can now benefit from these reductions and the advances in technology.

"Our new Smart Backalarms, for example, use advanced digital sound sampling and a listen-



New Backalarm system offers improved sound and lifetime guarantee.

ing profile matched to workplace noise. They self-adjust their

sound pressure level to 5-10 dB above ambient noise - continuously delivering safety with minimum noise nuisance."

To underline its confidence in the new Backalarms Brigade is introducing a new lifetime warranty covering all alarms for the lifetime of the vehicle. Delivery has also been improved so that orders placed by stockists by 4.00pm will be guaranteed a next weekday delivery.

www.brigade-electronics.co.uk

Awards for Metroline system

METROLINE HAS won the National Transport Award for Technology for its satellite positioning system, iRIS (Intelligent Route Information System) which has been used to improve the performance of its London bus services.

Following an initial 28-bus pilot, iRIS has been rolled out to two more garages, incorporating 247 buses which operate across 13 routes in north west London.

The iRIS system is provided by German manufacturer INIT.

The heart of iRIS is the on-board computer, COPILOT. This calculates the location and the current schedule situation and informs the central control system via GPRS whether the vehicle exceeds defined thresholds in the schedule. The fleet management system is able to control the intervals of all buses on an entire route automatically by giving instructions to the driver. INIT claims that even in dense traffic, bunching of buses will be avoided.

"I am delighted that Metroline have won this award, recognising our continued investment in technology which enables us to provide improved service reliability to our customers," says Steve McAleavy, Metroline managing director. "The software supplied by INIT has proved to be very reliable and capable of handling the transition from a 28-bus pilot to a 247-bus rollout."

INIT GmbH 00 49 721 6100 113

Speedy online grant applications

THE ENERGY Saving Trust has launched a new online grant application system for its TransportEnergy programmes. EST says that the online application process takes less than five minutes to complete and gives applicants immediate confirmation of grant availability.

The system identifies whether the vehicle or modification is eligible for funding and will

check on grant availability. Applicants can receive immediate confirmation of a conditional grant offer. Customers can also view the progress of the application by entering their personal user name and password.

"As demand for our grants and advice continues to increase we are continually seeking to improve the way we operate," says Richard Tarboton, head of EST TransportEnergy.

"This new online application system is evidence of this. It will not only make us more efficient, it will speed up the grant process for customers and help them with their own planning processes."

The existing paper-based application process will remain for those who do not have internet access.

**www.powershift.org.uk
www.cleanup.org.uk**

Centenary celebrations at Thamesdown

THERE AREN'T many transport operators who can mark 100 years of service, but one which can is Thamesdown Transport. Its predecessor, Swindon Corporation, started running electric trams in 1904. These were discontinued in 1929, replaced by motorbuses. The operation became Thamesdown Transport when local government was re-organised in 1974, and today it is one of the few council-owned bus operations to survive in Britain.

To mark the centenary, one of this year's deliveries of TransBus Darts was painted gold, and the company is holding a major celebratory rally at the Science

Museum's site on the outskirts of the town on Sunday 12 September. This will host a wide selection of former Thamesdown and Swindon buses, as well as other vehicles from around the country.

Interestingly the company still operates from the one-time tram depot in the centre of the town, although work starts on a new out of town depot this month.

And it's also worth noting that while managing director John Owen is far from marking his centenary, he has been at the helm of Thamesdown Transport for a very long time - 21 years, no less.



Down on the farm . . .

THERE'S A whole new meaning to taking kids on the bus down in Dorset, as demonstrated here by Wilts & Dorset marketing manager Chris Harris.

Visitors traveling by bus to Farmer Palmers Farm used to have a half-mile walk from the nearest stop. Now three nearby services have been re-routed to stop at the gate of the attraction. "The driver does not even have to make a ewe turn," says Chris Harris - a trifle sheepishly I hope.

If you're going to take a gander at the farm just make sure there's no horse-play on



■ Wilts & Dorset's Chris Harris takes customer care very seriously.

the bus, is my advice.

Don't these puns just get your goat? However I feel I do have to milk them for what they're worth - but I'll stop rabbiting on now. There must be an udder way to write about farms.

Lost on Skye

I KNOW it sounds a bit unlikely, but I'm assured it's true and that it happened a few months ago.

A perplexed-looking gentleman of Pakistani origin was seen, apparently lost, on the Isle of Skye, having alighted from a Scottish Citylink coach from Glasgow.

He was in Broadford, which is more than a village but less than a metropolis, and while he might have been pleasantly surprised at the beauty of his surroundings, he was also apparently slightly puzzled that it wasn't quite as big and busy as he had expected.

And that, of course, is because he thought he'd bought a ticket to Bradford . . .

Those were the days . . .

ARRIVA NORTH West is extending its Le Bus branding in Liverpool, the location of this photograph taken 20 years ago when the idea of Le Bus would doubtless have prompted some sharp-witted Scouse riposte. Part of what is now Arriva North West was once Ribble Motor Services, one of the biggest subsidiaries of the National Bus Company, and its fleet was made up mainly of Leylands.

This was an Atlantean, a model which Ribble had started buying in 1959 and finished buying 22 years later with this batch of 30 with 74-seat bodywork by ECW which were delivered in 1981. Later in the year the company would get



its first Leyland Olympians, the model which replaced the Atlantean.

Integration was the name of the game back then, and Ribble buses operating on Merseyside carried the PTE logo, a strange device looking like a ring of barbed wire but probably representing railway tracks. In

this picture it's barely visible behind the Ribble fleetname.

Ribble's southern operations, including those on Merseyside, were split off to form a new North Western company which was bought by Drawlane which then metamorphosed into British Bus, was bought by Cowie and was then renamed Arriva.

E DIARY EVENTS

Sunday 12 September
Competition: Bus Driver of the Year finals, Blackpool. 0161 427 5986
www.bdoy.co.uk

Wednesday-Thursday
15-16 September
Exhibition and conference:
Passenger Transport Solutions,
Olympia 2, London. 01926 834795.
www.aboutpts.com

Thursday-Thursday
23-30 September
Exhibition: IAA Commercial Vehicle Show, Hanover.
www.iaa.de

Tuesday 12 October
ROSCO Worksop: Safely Does It, Warwick.
01865 775552.

Wednesday 13 October
Conference: Achieving Excellence, Nottingham.
www.bus-industry-awards.com

Wednesday-Saturday
13-16 October
Exhibition: FIAA International Bus and Coach Trade Fair, Madrid.
www.fiaa.ifema.es

Tuesday 2 November
Conference: Fighting Bus Crime, Liverpool.
020 7944 2297

Tuesday-Thursday 2-4 November
Exhibition: Coach & Bus 2004, NEC, Birmingham. 020 7240 5800.
www.coachandbusshow.com

Tuesday-Friday 9-12 November
Exhibition: Community Transport Event 2004, G-Mex, Manchester.
www.communitytransport.com

Thursday 18 November Lunch:
Ninth Annual Bus Industry Awards, London.
www.bus-industry-awards.com

Saturday-Sunday
20-21 November Exhibition:
Coach & Bus show, Dublin.
www.cttc.ie

Thursday 27 January 2005
Dinner: CPT Annual Dinner, London Hilton hotel.
www.cpt-uk.org

In the second of our Walk the Talk series, **Gavin Booth** has an energetic day keeping up with Steve Burd at Blackpool Transport.



YOU can usually tell a lot from a quick glance around the managing director's office. Steve Burd's office at Blackpool has model buses on display - maybe he's a bit of a bus enthusiast - and football trophies - perhaps Blackpool Transport FC has been doing particularly well. In this case I was wrong on both counts. Steve wouldn't describe himself as a bus enthusiast, although his enthusiasm for the business would become evident during the day. The bus models actually represent the companies he has worked with in his career. His real enthusiasm is football, and the trophies are his, won by teams he has coached in Cumbria. The signed Leyton Orient ball is perhaps the biggest giveaway, though there's also the tan, which was picked up in Portugal recently when he was out there for two weeks supporting England with his youngest son.

It was a sunny Monday morning in mid-July right at the start of the Glasgow Fair holidays, when the Blackpool season traditionally starts to take off. With 170 buses and Britain's best-known tramway under his control, what makes Steve tick? I was there to shadow him as the second victim in *Bus and Coach Professional's* new 'Walk the Talk' series.

It had been Tram Sunday at Fleetwood the previous day, and Steve had been on duty with the local dignitaries. But at 08.15 Monday morning he breezes in through the doors of the depot office to find out how the week-

On the right TRACK

end had gone. Tram Sunday is a busy day, but Vinnie Watson, his chief inspector, reports that everything went smoothly and promises to get back with revenue figures later in the day. One of the older trams had a slight hiccup, but it was quickly sorted and back out on the track, he says.

Outside the depot office drivers are milling around between duties and Steve makes a point of acknowledging them all. As we climb the stairs to his office he talks about his approach to staff. "You need to carry people with you," he says. "When I came here in 2002 my first priority was to improve the financial position of the company, and the only way you can do this is to win the hearts and minds of the staff and persuade them that what we're doing is right for all of us."

Up in his office he starts the day with a couple of phone calls. "If I phone early, there's a better chance people will get back to me during the day," he says. He

is currently secretary of ALBUM, the local authority managers' association, and the first call is to Nottingham managing director, Mark Fowles about a meeting later in the week. Then a call to Blackpool Borough Council to set up a meeting to discuss responsibility for tram shelters beyond the council's boundary in Cleveleys, Lancashire.

Steve explains the relationship with Blackpool council. "Blackpool Transport Services is an arm's length company," he says, "and although the council owns the famous coastal tramway, we are contracted to operate it and maintain the overhead. A council team maintains the track and the council is responsible for tram stops and shelters in the town, but there is currently a dispute about shelters over the boundary to the north in Wyre district. We have suggested that we could pay for the sought-after shelters in Cleveleys provided that we are given certain advertising rights, and that's what we're hoping to

resolve with the other parties involved."

There is just time for a quick rundown on Blackpool Transport before we head off for his 09.30 meeting. Steve produces a system map and a set of attractive timetable leaflets, all colour-coded to the route-branding that has been introduced on the core routes - 'lines' in Blackpool-speak. "Since the company introduced the Metro Coastlines network in April 2001 we've enjoyed year-on-year passenger growth," he says. "In the first 18 months we had 4.8 per cent growth and last year it was 1.9 per cent. A lot of this is due to the simplified frequencies and routes and the clear branding, for which I give my current team as well as Liz Esnouf and Tony Depledge great credit. We have also looked to expand the market where opportunities arise." He points to Line 2 on the map. Lancashire County Council originally supported an hourly service 77 town route around St Anne's. Blackpool Transport of-

■ Steve Burd with engineering director Bill Gibson.

66 The council recognise that the only way to grow the market is to give the customers the service they want, and to do this they must let the professionals run the business.

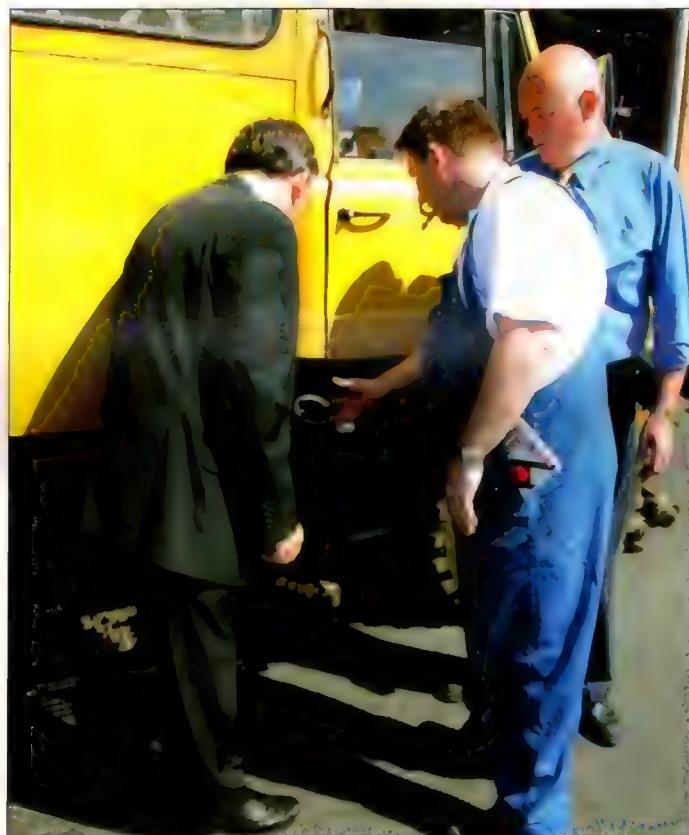
77

ferred the local authority an extra bus to increase the frequency to half-hourly and to provide new links from other estates to Lytham, South Shore and Victoria Hospital. The passengers and revenue have increased dramatically and the additional pump-priming support that was initially required has now been withdrawn. Instead of an hourly supported service the council now gets a half-hourly improved service and a range of new links for the same minimum subsidy cost.

"Dialogue with the local authorities is important," Steve says, "and we must be proactive in putting proposals forward. The danger, of course, is that the route goes out to tender and we lose it. That's why it's important to make sure that we have the competitive advantage."

Less than 10 per cent of Blackpool's services are supported during the day, and all but a few evening services are run commercially. "We provide a high level of evening and Sunday service," he says. "We can't grow the public transport market if we don't. If we are to persuade people to leave their cars, then they must be able to use our services at all times."

Although Blackpool has worked hard to extend its tourist season, which stretches right through to the end of the Illuminations in November, the high cost of providing the peak seasonal service required brings a cost penalty. Currently there is a dual-pricing policy, with Seasiders Cards for locals offering advantageous fares. Blackpool Transport offers a range of one, three, five and seven-day Travel-



cards valid on buses and trams, but Steve would like to move towards bus-only tickets as well as bus and tram tickets. It is, Steve admits, a sensitive area, because Blackpool Transport pays the borough council 50 per cent of the tramway profits as track rental, and the council also receives a dividend based on profits earned by the buses and the trams. From a 2000-2001 profit of £166,000 on a turnover of £16.2million, the equivalent 2003-2004 figures are £1.39 million profit on an £18.6million turnover - "that's without any cuts to the commercial network," Steve adds.

"There is a history of under-investment and we need to renew vehicles, replace plant and equipment and train staff. The profits go back into the business and into public transport in Blackpool. Recently the track was renewed north of Thornton Gate, a massive task, and the increased contributions to the council were ring fenced for that purpose. Our objective is not profit maximization though; we have to balance profits with providing a quality service."

Steve admits that Blackpool Transport and Blackpool Borough Council's interests don't always coincide, but the board

and the council recognise the need for Blackpool Transport to be run as a separate business. "The council is very supportive," he says. "They recognise that the only way to grow the market is to give the customers the service they want, and to do this they must let the professionals run the business. In return we work very closely with the council to help secure its aspirations."

My whistle-stop introduction to Blackpool Transport complete, Steve and I nip downstairs for a marketing meeting. The staff responsible for timetable information, complaints, schedules and marketing are gathered in a meeting room, and Steve starts by updating them on coming service changes and a proposed new service. Other service changes fill a gap between the commercial daytime service and a supported evening service, just at the time many visitors to the town are heading out to the many entertainment venues. In return he is advised that timetables are in production and roadside publicity will be in place for earlier planned initiatives.

Discussion moves on to the next edition of the Metro Guide, due in November. This is a guide to all services plus a colour-coded map, and it is distributed to some 100,000 households in the town. The November date-change is dictated by the end of the Illuminations, and Steve likes to align service changes with publication of the guide.

Steve checks that posters for the forthcoming Open Day at Rigby Road depot (on Sunday

Continued on Page 18 ▶

On the right TRACK

► Continued from Page 23



■ Steve Burd and financial director Allan Leach.

12 September) are being applied, and at 09.55 the meeting closes. It's a friendly, good-humoured meeting, where everybody who is involved is kept fully in the picture.

On the way back upstairs Steve pops in to check the staffing situation with Annie Ogilvie, the human resources manager. "Good news," she greets him. "No resignations this week and four test passes!" With the main summer season just beginning, this is what Steve wants to hear. Currently he employs 450 bus and tram drivers and 110 seasonal conductors, and while many of the seasonal staff come back year after year, staff turnover has increased as opportunities arise for employment elsewhere that doesn't involve evening and weekend work. Where possible, exit interviews are held to find out why staff leave, and all new staff now meet David Eaves, the operations director, for a cup of tea and a chat early in their employment. "We are trying to be more supportive," Steve says.

Annie briefs Steve on two po-

lice campaigns that are tackling homophobia and gender issues, and racism. There have been isolated problems involving staff and passengers, but Steve and Annie agree that it's not a major problem in Blackpool.

Back in his office at 10.00 and engineering director, Bill Gibson, pops his head round Steve's door to update him on the plan to provide a new crew relief canteen in the town centre in case, as seems possible, the Rigby Road depot is ever moved to make way for a leisure development.

Next at the office door is Allan Leach, Steve's financial director. There is a plan to run a restaurant tram on the town's tramway, and Allan and Steve need to consider the licensing agreement in detail. They have both read it and now compare notes as they re-read it, line by line. Although they are happy with the idea, there is much in the agreement that they want to change, or seek clarification on, before the draft agreement is passed to their lawyers. Allan leaves another wad of paper with Steve, relating to an unfortunate fatal accident on the Rigby Road site at the beginning of 1991. The Health & Safety Executive has just decided to prosecute Blackpool Transport and Steve needs to study the evidence on which the prosecution is being based, in order to plan the company's defence.

The next head round the door is checking if Steve needs lunch in the canteen, but today he's lunching out - an unusual situation, he hastens to assure me. Most days he eats in the staff canteen. "It's important

not to be seen as remote," he tells me.

Down to the depot yard at 11.25 to look at a Unimog that is used to maintain the tramway overhead. A dispute over fuel has resulted in a dismissal, and Steve is the last point of appeal. Fleet engineer Dave Hislop is there with union rep John Boughton, and tests are carried out in an attempt to establish the facts as part of the rehearing.

Bill Gibson joins us and we walk across to the bodyshop, an enthusiasts' paradise with extensive rebuilds underway on two of the trams. Bill explains that the tram fleet means that Blackpool Transport retains skills that other fleets no longer need, a mix of traditional woodworking and current metal body skills. "If we didn't have the trams," he says, "we probably wouldn't tackle so much in-house." Bill explains that after 1985 the fleet was reduced, and many skilled men retired, but with the closure of the Duple coachworks in the town, many new staff were recruited. On average 2.5 trams are refurbished each year, and when they're back on the track they should be good for a further 20 years.

Then it's off to a hotel in the South Shore area for lunch at 12.30 with three tramway enthusiasts. On the way, Steve explains that the company is very aware of the importance of support from tramway enthusiasts, and this group meets regularly to offer historical advice to Steve and Bill and, as we would discover, to make a case for a sympathetic restoration.

Over lunch there is general

discussion about the coming Open Day, and a draft script is passed over to Steve, for possible use by Andy Mitchell of the local Radio Wave, who will be covering the event. After coffee the three enthusiasts, Graham Twidale, Chris Pulling and Derek Shepherd, cut to the chase. They know that only two of the distinctive second series 'Balloon' trams - the first series are celebrating their 70 anniversary this year - survive with most of their original fittings, and argue strongly that from these two one car should be restored to near original 1934/35 condition, which would fill a gap in the 'heritage' fleet. Steve and Bill are sympathetic, but point out that the railway inspectorate is becoming more concerned about pedestrian safety, and there are features of the original design that are less than ideal from this perspective. Several of the Balloons have been rebuilt with smoother ends, and Steve hopes that by rebuilding more trams to this standard in the future, the HMRI will agree to one final authentic restoration. There is money from a bequest that could be used for the task, and Steve agrees to pursue the matter.

We dash back to Steve's office for a 14.00 appointment. Kim Burns, a driver, is to receive vouchers in recognition of her excellent assessment by a mystery traveller. Each month the five top drivers receive awards, and Steve likes to meet his employees. "It's a way of saying thank you to staff," he says.

More staff matters at 14.30 as we head for the training school to meet nine new recruits. Steve

" Over the past three years we've bought 37 new lowfloor buses at a cost of £4.6million.



chats to them and asks what they did before joining Blackpool Transport. He welcomes them to the company and describes some of the things that have been happening and some of the future plans. "Over the past three years we've bought 37 new lowfloor buses at a cost of £4.6million," he says, and outlines the improving profit situation. He reassures them on the important topic of money. "We've paid above-inflation wage awards in each of the last three years," he says, "and we're trying to ensure that everyone at the company benefits from our improved profitability." He tells them that he lunches in the canteen most days and encourages them to pop across and talk to him if they have something on their mind.

At 14.45 we collect chief inspector Vinnie Watson and head off in the traffic car to see how things are doing on the Promenade. The weather is still good and there seem to be plenty of people about and, just as important, plenty of trams that seem to be well-loaded. "Monday is historically change-over day after the weekend visitors," Vinnie explains, "so it's usually quiet until lunchtime, then it gets busier." We drive along to the Pleasure Beach, observing passing trams and looking for queues at tram stops. There are no queues - a good sign that we've got the service levels right, says Vinnie. Steve explains that this summer the basic tramway service from 08.30 right through to 23.00 provides a ten-minute frequency between Starr Gate, in the south, to Cleveleys Square, with alternate trams carrying on to Fleetwood. This improved standard frequency was designed to mirror the Metro Coastlines bus philosophy and to reduce the need for so many 'special' cars, but Vinnie knows he has crews and trams available that can be pressed into service at short notice, if necessary. The weather is an important factor too. "If it's a warm day, people will walk. It's when it's cold or wet people flock on to the trams," says Vinnie.

On Tuesdays the Fleetwood service is particularly busy. "There's a market at Fleetwood on other days," Vinnie adds, "but everyone wants to go on a Tuesday. It's traditional. At least we know that demand will be highest on Tuesday."

Vinnie looks for other signs to gauge demand over the coming



week. Empty car parks in front of the hotels that line the Promenade, and a sea of 'Vacancy' signs suggests that the season is not yet in full flight.

Steve mentions to Vinnie complaints from advertisers that their painted trams are not always in evidence, and emphasises the need to allocate trams carrying overall adverts ahead of the rest. And he asks Vinnie if he thinks a ten-minute evening frequency is going to be enough this week. Vinnie thinks this frequency using double-deckers is just right, with each tram shifting some 90 passengers.

As Vinnie drops us back at Rigby Road at 15.45, he advises Steve that revenue from Tram Sunday was much the same as the previous year, but using fewer cars. We look into the canteen and a couple of drivers come up to Steve to pass on some comments and information. Then it's time to check the day's post, and he reads through council

correspondence, complimentary letters and the odd complaint, and sorts mail to be passed on to colleagues. David Eaves, the operations director, is on holiday, so Steve is dealing with his correspondence.

Home for Steve is in Cumbria, where his three sons are at school, so during the week he lives more locally in a small second property. This makes it easier for him to take up invitations to speak to local groups, which he does regularly. Tonight he will be at the Town Hall telling the Blackpool Civic Trust about the company's past, present and future - a future that could involve converting the coastal tramway into a modern light rail system. A £126million bid is currently being considered by the DfT and the Treasury, and would allow replacement of much track and overhead, the provision of lowfloor-compliant tram stop infrastructure, a new depot, and 19 articulated,



wheelchair-accessible, trams. In the peak season the new trams would be supplemented by the heritage fleet. He hopes for a positive response, and says that it could be up and running in some three-and-a-half years from a decision. He does, however, recognise that because of problems with some new light rail systems elsewhere, further work could be required in light of the National Audit Office's recent report.

Steve Burd has one of the more interesting jobs in local transport, you suspect. He came through the legendary NBC senior management training scheme, and worked for Stagecoach as operations director at Cumberland before moving to the north-east as commercial director for Arriva North East and its various predecessors. With the tramway, and the possibility of an upgrade to light rail standards, he runs one of the best-known transport systems in Britain. And the 170-strong bus fleet, often overshadowed by the trams, is flourishing as a result of imaginative branding and improvements to routes and frequencies. Much of Blackpool Transport's recent success is surely down to Steve and his team. If this was a typical day, and he assures me it was, it was tiring simply keeping up with him. But it was good to see how much he is prepared to listen to those around him, and how much he involves his staff in the whole process.

And then he was off to the Town Hall and the Civic Trust. Me? I went off to recover.



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Lighting up the route

“Access to more colours would permit operators to be a lot more innovative when it comes to promoting destinations and routes.

”

MULTICOLOURED destination displays using LEDs - Light Emitting Diodes - could soon be seen on British buses.

Vultron International promises to have such a display available in early 2006. "We may even be able to launch it a little earlier," says managing director John Moorhouse.

There are one or two significant drawbacks to such panels however, not the least of them being price. "They could cost 25 to 30 per cent more than existing LED displays initially, although the price would gradually come down as sales volumes rose," observes Indicators

International general manager, Tom Diamond.

Moorhouse says that the premium over current LED panels ought to be from 30 to 40 per cent, but admits that customers would object to paying that much extra. "They might be prepared to pay around 10 per cent more," he remarks.

One reason for the higher cost is that such displays are complicated to produce.

"Bear in mind that each LED requires six or eight connections if you're going multicolour compared with two connections for each LED used if you stick with plain amber," says Bright-Tech Developments sales director

John Stornmont. "Given that you can have as many as 4,700 LEDs in a front panel, that's a lot of connections."

"That adds to the expense, and the matrix boards that support these multi-connection LEDs cost more too."

Access to more colours would permit operators to be a lot more innovative when it comes to promoting destinations and routes, especially in areas where certain routes are associated with particular colours. "You could have a lilac-coloured display for the Lilac Route, for instance," Stornmont suggests.

It would also give them
Continued on Page 22 ▶

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Lighting up the route

► Continued from Page 21

greater opportunity to allow, for example, local supermarkets to promote themselves.

Multicoloured exhortations to "Shop at Tesco" for example could be flashed up every so often, creating an extra source of revenue and helping offset the higher cost of the new panels.

Stormont fears an adverse reaction from passenger groups, however, especially those concerned about the partially sighted. Even those passengers whose sight isn't bad - but isn't quite what it was - may be less than impressed by such a change, he suggests.

"Just suppose you're an elderly person waiting for the bus in the pouring rain wearing a pair of wet bifocals," he observes. "All you want is to be sure that you're getting on the right bus. I'm not sure that you want it to tell you to 'shop at so-and-so's."

There's another potential



problem with multicolour panels, and that's the lighting regulations. They forbid red to be shown at the front of the vehicle, so any display that included it, even fleetingly, would presumably be illegal.

Even if multicolour displays fail to take off, single-colour

LED displays look set to grow in popularity, eventually eclipsing flip dots.

Employing printed circuit boards and alloy extrusions, they're light in weight - some panels tip the scales at as little as 7kg - and often no more than 50mm deep. What's more, they

■ London favours the clarity of roller blinds with yellow lettering.

require next to no maintenance because they don't have any moving points and don't rely on a fluorescent tube that periodically needs changing.

"Prices are coming down too," says Moorhouse.

"They're now on a par with what's charged for flip-dot panels," says Nick Robertson, marketing manager at Hanover Displays.

The use of ambient light sensors to adjust their brightness has helped address criticisms that such displays aren't always easy to read. Although other tones have been tried, amber tends to be favoured because it performs well in both sunlight and darkness.

McKenna Brothers may be the longest established company in the UK producing printed destination blinds but it is also heavily into LEDs. Recent LED contract wins include Reading Buses' fleet of 17 East Lancs/Scania OmniDekkas. McKenna Brothers has also supplied destination systems to Lincolnshire Road Car, Isle of Wight Council,

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■ McKenna supplied destination equipment for five East Lancs Mylennium Sprytes for the park-and-ride service 802, between Martlesham and Ipswich Town Centre.

Travel West Midlands and Travel Dundee.

"At McKenna Brothers we like to give our customers a choice of destination displays, whether it be LED, flip-dot, smartblind or traditional printed. We can even supply a combination of signs all programmed from the same controller," says Vincent McKenna.

With LEDs, destinations can be scrolled. You can keep the final destination and route-number static, with the names of intermediate points running continuously underneath.

While Diamond agrees that LEDs are rising in popularity, he points out that flip-dots can be durable too. "Good-quality systems can last for 30 years," he says.

Futhermore, some flip-dots displays now rely on LEDs for illumination, eliminating the need for tube replacement.

Not that LEDs represent the only game in town. Bright-Tech



for example is working with a sister company on ways in which electro-luminescent lamps can be used in conjunction with LCDs - Liquid Crystal Displays - and plasma screens. "This heralds the next generation of destination displays," contends Stormont.

Panels that use LCDs are al-

ready in service in Europe, but have marked drawbacks. For a kick-off, they're heavy, says Moorhouse. "You need a forklift truck to lift them into place, and they rely on a fluorescent tube that will eventually need changing," he observes. "What's more, they're around 50 per cent more expensive than LED

displays."

They can also prove fragile and vulnerable to damage. Most suppliers admit however that they score highly when it comes to clarity.

With all this talk about LEDs, LCDs, and electro-luminescence, it's surprising that printed blinds are still around.



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Contacts

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- 01202 679627

Indicators International

- 028 796 32591

McKenna Brothers

- 0161 655 3244

Norbury Blinds

- 0121 359 4311

Hanover Displays

- 01273 407715

Vultron International

- 0113 263 0323

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www.bright-tech.co.uk

www.indicators-int.com

www.mckennabrothers.co.uk

www.norbury-blinds.com

www.hanoverdisplays.com

www.vultron.co.uk



Transport for London remains firmly in favour of them however, arguing that they provide clarity. Many smaller operators prefer them too, according to Terry Rawlins of Norbury Blinds.

"I think there'll always be a market for them," he comments. "It may shrink, but it won't dis-

appear.

"It's unlikely that anybody with just half-a-dozen buses is going to want to convert them to digital displays."

Printed blinds are durable, he contends, and few of them fade nowadays. "Remember that no single destination display is

■ Destination displays can be used to provide other information, such as "Vehicle reversing" when reverse gear is engaged.

exposed to sunlight for all that long because the blind rotates," he says.

To combat fading, McKenna Brothers has developed McKennaglo, a special coating that stops fluorescent yellow fading to white.

Nor is there any need to change blinds manually with the advent of motorised blinds. Sit in the cab and tap in the destination and route number, and the display changes automatically.

Flash memory cards and appropriately programmed laptops are regularly used to alter LED displays. "It's possible to partition the display and change fonts and logos as required," says Stormont.

Combine that facility with full colour, and operators will be able to create some extraordinary effects. The only questions are whether potential advertisers will wish to make use of them, and whether the paying public will be happy about the results.



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Training is a vital component in ensuring the bus and coach industry has the skills it needs for the future. **Steve Banner** investigates.



Looking to the FUTURE

"

One of GoSkills biggest tasks once licensed will be to cope with the impact of the proposed EU directive on driver training.

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THE NEXT few months should see GoSkills licensed as the recognised Sector Skills Council for the passenger transport sector, says chief executive, Peter Huntington. "We've been told it's going to happen, and in the meantime we're not letting the grass grow under our feet," he comments.

GoSkills is busy recruiting a team of eleven regional business advisers, and at the time of writing had already appointed people to cover London, the north west of England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Their role will include sourcing training funding, working with colleges and other training providers, and talking to operators to identify their training needs.

"We're planning to get more public money into the sector, and we want to know from

operators nationwide what their top three training priorities are," says Huntington.

GoSkills has also helped develop the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Examination Board's Level 2 Certificate in Road Passenger Transport in conjunction with Education Development International.

Embracing 15 units covering topics such as providing a school transport service, ticketing, fares, and handling money, it's been accepted into the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's National Qualifications framework. It's been accredited for five years.

In the light of the disappointing findings of a recent survey of travellers with disabilities conducted by MORI for DPTAC, it's worth noting that GoSkills has

just completed DVDs and CD-ROMs addressing the topic of disability awareness. Marketed under the "We can do that" banner, they've been produced in conjunction with the Department for Transport.

One of GoSkills biggest tasks once licensed will be to cope with the impact of the proposed EU directive on driver training. It's set to come into effect in Britain in 2008, says Huntington.

"A lot will depend on which approach the Driving Standards Agency recommends to the Secretary of State after consultation," he comments. "We're keen to work closely with the DSA to help devise a scheme that operators will find acceptable."

"In fact we'd like to see a senior executive from the industry

seconded to liaise with all interested parties, including Brussels as well as employers, trainers and the DSA, to ensure that the best possible programme is developed."

One route to achieving a Certificate of Professional Competence (not to be confused with the CPC held by transport managers) could be on-the-job training with an examination at the end. The other - not the route GoSkills favours - could be an off-the-job classroom based training scheme with what Huntington refers to as "a light testing regime".

Ongoing training for drivers will also be a requirement to ensure hard-won skills don't become stale.

Funding for training is a key consideration for both training providers and operators.

Fortunately Omnibus Training has been able to obtain European Social Fund backing through the London Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) to run a two-year development programme for workers employed by bus and coach companies in the capital. The idea is for participants to achieve a Level 2 National Vocational Qualification in



Road Passenger Transport, with the accent on customer care. The scheme ends in December.

"Initially it only embraced drivers, but it's been extended to include other employees," says Omnibus managing director,

Frank Foy. "Of the 865 who have been thorough the programme to date, around 664 have achieved their NVQs. The aim is to have 1,139 take part, and 912 qualify.

"We're running the scheme

out of three centres - Wimbledon, Bellsize Park, and Mile End."

That's not the only programme the LSCs are engaged in. Along with the European Social Fund, the London East LSC is helping to finance Bexley College's Bus Lane project.

Aimed at unemployed people in East London who would like a career in the transport industry, it's a six-week course covering topics such as health and safety and customer service as well as preparing participants for the bus driving aptitude test. Everybody who takes part is guaranteed an interview with a bus company at the end of the programme; the college is working in partnership with London Central and First as well as Job Centre Plus.

A high percentage of the students are from ethnic minorities, who aren't always used to formal classroom training, and English is the second language for most of them. As a consequence the project aims to incorporate more ESOL - (English for Speakers of other Languages) in the next programme.

One student had been unem-
Continued on Page 28 ▶

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Looking to the FUTURE

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We'd like to see a senior executive from the industry seconded to liaise with all interested parties, including Brussels as well as employers, trainers and the DSA.



Peter Huntington
GOSKILLS



ployed for a year after starting out as a painter and decorator. He left school at 14 with no qualifications. Literacy skills - or the lack of them - were among his biggest barriers to gaining

employment.

"I went for an interview with a bus company, but I had problems writing an accident report in the test, so they referred me to Bus Lane," he says. "I've learnt the skills I need, and now I have a new career."

The London East LSC points out that better training for transport industry employees is more vital than ever before now that the capital has been shortlisted to play host to the 2012 Olympics.

Elsewhere, and working closely with CPT, the Freight

Transport Association is continuing to expand its involvement in the provision of training for bus and coach operators. It's developing its Leamington Spa site as a passenger transport centre of excellence.

"We're running four in-company transport manager CPC courses for Cardiff Bus this year," says Jeff Marsh, FTA Midlands and West training manager with special responsibilities for PCVs. "We've completed two already, with the others due in September and December.

"In each case we're talking

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We've had a couple of coach companies inquire about Working Time Directive seminars. There are still some anomalies in the rules to be ironed out so we're not taking bookings yet.

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Jeff Marsh

FTA



about five days of intensive study plus a case study workshop and an exam at the end. It's the case study that seems to hold the greatest fear for delegates."

Drivers and fitters are attending the courses as well as white collar staff. "Remember that today's drivers and technicians are tomorrow's managers," he remarks.

So what's a course like that cost? "We charge £1,000 a day to train approximately 10 delegates," he replies.

The FTA is also carrying out Drivers Hours and records training for National Express, and will be running a programme of "Protect your 'O' Licence" courses for operators in 2005.

"We've had a couple of coach companies inquire about Working Time Directive seminars," he says. "There are still some anomalies in the rules to be ironed out so we're not taking bookings yet, but we will once matters have been clarified."

With assaults on drivers seemingly on the increase, Hull-based training company PHP is running courses aimed at helping them deal with irate passengers.

"What we try to do is give those who attend an insight into human behaviour, and an understanding of how difficult

situations can be defused," says director Dean Hines. "The courses last for from one to two days, and then we like to see them again a few weeks later

to see if they've been able to put what they've learned into practice."

Cost? £995 per day, plus expenses, and 12 people can

be trained at a time. If that can help prevent a few more drivers being assaulted and seriously injured, then it has to be worthwhile.



Contacts

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ENFORCED QUALITY



The debate about tighter controls on the bus industry has been raging for years, with little progress. However, the Transport Act 2000 delivered legislation for the introduction of the Statutory Quality Bus Partnership. Four years later, as **Peter Plisner** reports, a transport authority in the midlands is about to become the first in the UK to use the new powers.

IT'S been a long time in coming, but finally the idea of a Statutory Quality Bus Partnership is about to become reality. In simple terms the SQBP is a regulated version of the voluntary bus quality partnership, which is already commonplace across the country. The SQBP was born out of a need to not only raise standards when new services are launched, but also to find a way of maintaining these standards for a prolonged period. In some locations, after highly publicised glossy launches, quality standards haven't always been maintained.

It's a problem that, according to Centro, the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive, has been experienced on some of its own quality partnerships,

known as Showcase routes. Bus development manager Richard Woods says: "Although the Showcase handbook exists and everyone should be following it, each organisation hasn't necessarily kept up-to-date with its obligations. The big difference with the SQBPs is that they will run for a minimum of five years and quality standards will have to be met throughout the whole period."

The UK's first Statutory Quality Bus Partnership will begin later this year on Birmingham's Route 67, which runs into the city centre from the Castle Vale area. It's been made possible by Section 114 of the Transport Act 2000, which gives powers for SQBPs to be introduced by the local authority if it assists with

implementing the policies set out in its bus strategy.

In the West Midlands the strategy includes a number of SQBPs planned for other Showcase routes. The SQBP agreement specifies the facilities to be provided by Centro and Birmingham City Council, and also sets standards to be met by bus operators as a condition of using the improved facilities. Key obligations for operators include the provision of clean low-floor vehicles, fitted with real-time information equipment and on-board CCTV. Birmingham City Council's obligations relate to highway infrastructure and the enforcement of bus lanes. Centro is responsible for providing and maintaining high-quality shelters and information.

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The big difference with the SQBPs is that they will run for a minimum of five years and quality standards will have to be met throughout the whole period.

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RICHARD WOODS
CENTRO



A combined package of monitoring mechanisms is also being incorporated into the agreement to ensure that the obligations of all parties are delivered. This will include a regular customer satisfaction survey and the evaluation of a number of specific targets. The framework is said to be similar to how the Department for Transport produces its Bus Quality Indicators which measure the average satisfaction score given by passengers for bus journeys.

According to Centro the ultimate objective of the agreement is to ensure that the highest possible quality of service is provided on the corridor and is sustained over the five years.

Bus operators failing to meet the required standards could be brought before the traffic commissioner, who is ultimately responsible for policing the agreement. However, it's thought unlikely that the traffic commissioner will be needed.

"As part of the agreement we will be setting up a steering group of all the partners," says Woods, "and it's envisaged if there are difficulties then in theory that would be sorted out at that stage, rather than having to go to the traffic commissioner".

A recent report from the Commission for Integrated Transport said the SQBP approach had "a useful role to play in setting the rights and responsibilities of

each party alongside performance penalties" although it was concerned that the legislation excluded the powers to stipulate fares and timetables.

The Centro-led agreement states that only those operators who meet the required standards and sign up to it will be allowed to use the improved facilities. Under the SQBP the traffic commissioner has the power to take action against operators who don't meet the required standards, but are using the improved facilities on the corridor. The SQBP legislation does allow for some exemptions, particularly for services operating only on part of the corridor.

Centro admits that the Route

67 could become a test case with the Department for Transport watching to see if it actually works and how enforceable it is on the ground. In an effort to simplify the concept Centro has decided that the Route 67 SQBP will cover a whole corridor. "The corridor is about seven kilometres and we've said that anything operating along more than 20 per cent of the corridor length would have to be part of the agreement, anything less than that would be exempt," says Woods.

Despite the prospect of increased regulation, some operators appear to be quite keen on the idea of SQBPs. Travel West

Continued on Page 32 ▶



66 "We've done the voluntary side and now we all want to work together to produce a decent partnership and a decent set of road conditions that will allow us to provide a reliable service."

77

MARTIN HANCOCK
TRAVEL WEST
MIDLANDS



ENFORCED QUALITY

► Continued from Page 31

“Two out of the three buses we run on the corridor are already low-floor and we will be purchasing a third one to make it all low-floor.”

DAVID WALL
NORTH BIRMINGHAM
BUSWAYS

Midlands is a signatory to the Route 67 agreement. It's committed to spending £2million replacing its existing fleet of Mercedes articulated buses with brand new Scania. The company's business development director Martin Hancock sees the Statutory Quality Bus Partnerships as a natural progression from the traditional quality partnership. "We've done the voluntary side and now we all want to work together to produce a decent partnership and a decent set of road conditions that will allow us to provide a reliable service."

A smaller operator, North Birmingham Busways, has also signed up to the agreement. "Two out of the three buses we run on the corridor are already low-floor and we will be purchasing a third one to make it all low-floor," says director of operations David Wall. "We'll also be fitting CCTV and real-time information equipment to our buses."

While Wall is 100 per cent behind the idea of the SQBP he's sceptical about how the legislation will work when it comes to keeping other operators, who don't meet the required standards, off the corridor. "I really can't understand how that fits in with the Office of Fair Trading rules and the existing bus deregulation legislation," he says.

Improvements in reliability of bus services will, in part, be

delivered by the provision of bus lanes. Route 67 has been chosen because it already has several miles of priority lanes. However for the SQBP concept to spread elsewhere in the conurbation, and indeed to other parts of the UK, many more bus lane miles will be required. In some areas they remain a very sensitive issue, both financially and politically.

TWM's Hancock says: "There's a big difference between the best intentions of what officers would like to see happen and what the members feel that they can take through with their constituents." But he agrees that there are no points to be won by imposing bus lanes on areas where they will be highly controversial. "At the end of the day a bus lane has got to be accepted by the population, otherwise people will ignore it on a mass scale."

The introduction of the Statutory Quality Bus Partnership could ultimately lead to a big improvement in the quality and reliability of bus services throughout the UK. However, success for the concept appears to depend on making the new legislation work on the ground, particularly when it comes to preventing operators who are not part of the agreement from using the improved facilities.

Peter Plisner is the BBC's midlands transport correspondent

“The SQBP agreement specifies the facilities to be provided by Centro and Birmingham City Council, and also sets standards to be met by bus operators as a condition of using the improved facilities.”

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WHO BUYS WHAT



Tiger European of Nottingham has taken delivery of a 33-seat Plaxton Cheetah. Designed to maintain the company's profile in a highly-competitive market place, the Cheetah is intended to provide the same travelling ambience as a full size coach. It is based on a Mercedes-Benz Vario chassis, and was supplied by Plaxton Coach Sales.



Four Wrightbus Eclipse Geminis are now in service with Yorkshire Coastliner on its services from Leeds to Bridlington, Scarborough and Whitby. The new vehicles provide a high standard of comfort for long-distance passengers, with high-backed moquette-trimmed Esteban seats and soft trim on the centre of the ceiling panels. They are based on Volvo B7TL chassis.



Hutchison of Overtown has expanded its fleet of low-floor buses with four Wrightbus Eclipse Urban single-deckers on Volvo B7RLE chassis. They bring to eight the number of low-floor Wrightbus vehicles in the Hutchison fleet. Stewart Anderson of Hutchison notes: "They are well-built, and have first-class back-up through Wright's Customcare support."



After taking delivery of its first Mellor Low Floor Sprinter, the East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership has ordered a second vehicle. The Mercedes-based Low Floor Sprinter is operating demand-responsive services in the Leatherhead/Dorking area and has been branded as BUSES4U. The vehicle can accommodate up to four passengers in wheelchairs.



After buying two Merit midibuses from Volvo in May, Wrexham-based GHA Coaches has purchased two more for use on Flintshire council's Mold to Chester service. The Merits, bodied by Wrightbus, have CCTV and a radio/cassette/CD player. "When we knew that we required two more low-floor buses, the Midi Merit was the obvious choice" says GHA's Gareth Davies.



Two Volvo B12Bs with double-deck Berkhof bodies have joined the fleet of Ferris Holidays of Cardiff. The air-conditioned coaches are 14.75m long and have 83 reclining seats. They have 420bhp engines and Volvo's new I-shift transmission. They are for use on continental holidays and Volvo reliability was a factor in Jason Ferris' buying decision.



After taking two Setra S315GT HDs last season to evaluate the model, Epsom Coaches has added a further seven to its fleet in 2004. "Product quality was one of the prime factors in our decision," says Epsom Coaches commercial director Steve Whiteway. "There are other benefits too in sourcing a vehicle from a single manufacturer."



Following an initial delivery of Setras in 2003, Hellyers of Fareham has returned to EvoBus UK for three more for 2004, bringing to six the number now in operation.

"We have had excellent passenger feedback," says Trevor Grant of Hellyers. "The Setra offers a high quality finish, and first-class comfort and reliability."



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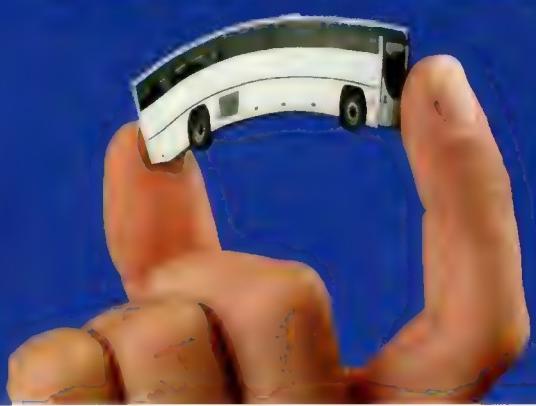
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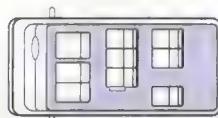
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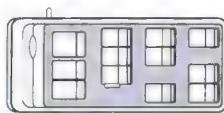
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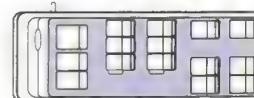
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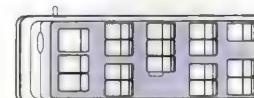
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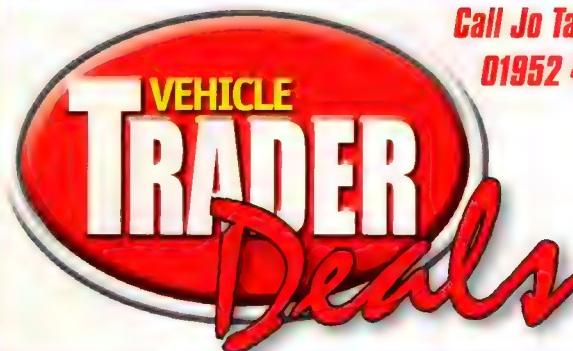
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Fleet No	Reg No	First date of reg	MOT expiry
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512	M512 VJO	28-2-95	9-11-04
515	M515 VJO	22-3-95	21-9-04
517	M517 VJO	1-4-95	2-11-04

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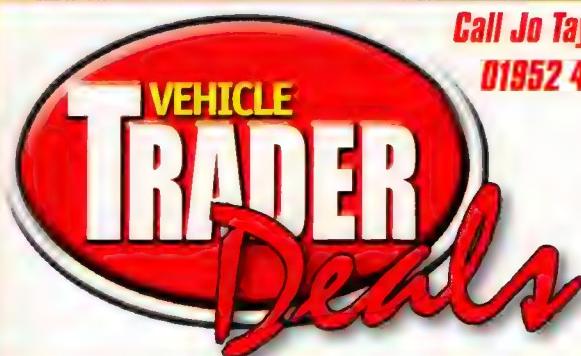
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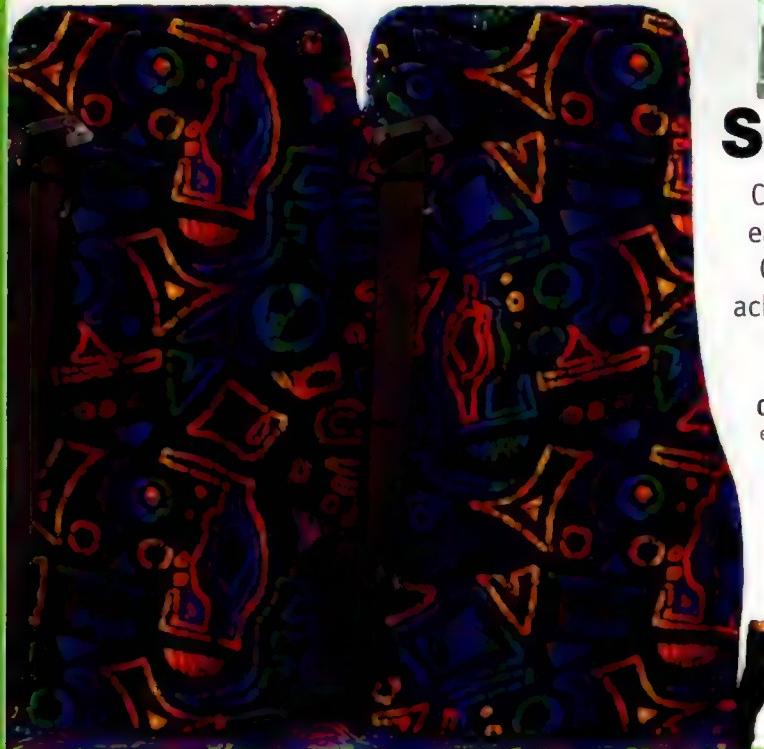
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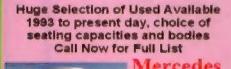


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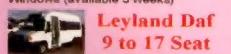


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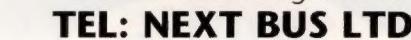
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2004 Mini Dart only 6500 miles

New Leyland Convoy LWB 16 Seat

5 Wheelchairs, Luxury Specification

New Mercedes Vito 9 Seats with take

seats, Auto

New Mercedes 711D 1996 Coach Spec

29+6+8 Upgraded Seats, Choice

Mercedes 811D 1991 Dual Purpose

Europe, Turbo, 31-6 Semi High Coach

Seats, Diptos, Poles, Belts, Power Door

Mercedes 811D 1992 33+9 Seats

Mercedes 811D 1993 33+10 Seats

Mercedes 711D 1996 Coach Spec

Turbo, 25 High Spec, Coach, Power

Door, Large Boot

Mercedes Sprinter 1996 15.3 Wheelchair

Mercedes 709D 1992 29+7 Seats

Mercedes 709D 1993 29+8 Seats

Mercedes 709D 1995 Alexander

33+13 Seats, Auto

Mercedes 709D 1995 Plaxton 25+8 Seats

Mercedes 609D 614D Coach Spec

1996 - 1998 24 Highback Seats, Belts,

Power Door, Boot, All Tested

Iveco Marshall 1995 & 1998 19+15

Standees or 26+6, Destin, Power Door

Metrorider 1992 31+8 Standees, Auto

Telma, Above average

1996 - 1998 24 Highback Seats, Belts,

Power Door, Boot, All Tested

Iveco Marshall 1995 & 1998 19+15

Standees or 26+6, Destin, Power Door

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Standees or 26+6, Destin, Power Door

WORKSHOP EQUIPMENT NEWS

There has never been a better time to acquire that piece of workshop equipment that would make life so much easier, reduce downtime and save on costs.

Having specialised in the sales and service of mobile column lifts for the last ten years, we are able to offer Kismet column from £6995.00 and a range of reconditioned and ex rental sets at prices you will find hard to believe. We also offer a complete range of spare parts for IME-autolift models produced from 1994.

In house brake testing is set to become an absolute necessity in the next few years and there has never been a better time to take advantage of the Kismet Brak6000 roller brake tester priced at a low low price of £12,995.00. We also have used machines at very competitive prices.

Choose from our vast range of general garage equipment both new and used and allow us to quote for the service, repair and calibration of your current equipment. We also have our own pipe fitters for all air, lubrication and exhaust extraction requirements.

All equipment is available on our low cost finance packages (subject to status) using either outside funding or our own finance facilities. All prices quoted are exclusive of VAT.

SPECIAL OFFER
**NEW SINGLE BRUSHWASH MACHINES DELIVERED AND
COMMISSIONED FROM £4,500.00**

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NICK NEWTON, who was the head of the London Bus Tendering Unit in its early days in the late 1980s, has been appointed chief executive of the Strategic Rail Authority. Newton worked for London Transport from 1970 to 1994, when he joined the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, where he became commercial director of that organisation and then of the SRA. He was latterly the SRA's deputy chief executive.

Another change at the SRA involving someone who has connections with London Transport is **DAVID QUARMBY**, who moves from deputy chairman to part-time chairman. Quarmby is a former managing director (buses) for LT and is on the board of Transport for London. Both appointments become effective next month. Quarmby succeeds current SRA chief executive **RICHARD BOWKER**, who is standing down in mid-September.

PETER SHELLEY left Southern Vectis at the beginning of August. He resigned from his position as Solent Blue Line operations director, having been one of the company founders in 1987.



Graham Beacom.

Coach Tourism council chief executive **GRAHAM BEACOM** is leaving the organisation to take on a leadership role in another travel industry-associated trade body. The CTC day-to-day management will be in the hands of **DAVID SMITH** for the time being whilst the management committee explores options for Beacom's replacement.



Paul Hughes.

Cogent Passenger Seating has appointed **PAUL HUGHES** as national sales manager. Hughes was an area sales manager for Rohill for three years, and before that worked for Britax. At Cogent he reports to commercial director **ROGER POWNALL**.

ANDREW WARRENDER, who for the last nine years has been in sales and marketing at Plaxton and its predecessors, TransBus and Kirkby Coach & Bus, is moving into a regional sales role at Mentor Coach & Bus, selling Neoplan and MAN coaches.

COLIN BLACK, a divisional director of JMP Consulting, has been elected chairman of the UK Association for Commuter Transport, succeeding **ALISTAIR DUFF** who retires after his three-year term in office.



John Brooks.

JOHN BROOKS has been appointed managing director of Fraser Eagle Management Services. He succeeds **KEVIN DEAN**, who is now the Accrington-based company's chief operating officer. Brooks was previously production director, and before joining Fraser Eagle 12 months ago was a project manager at Network Rail.

TRAFFIC MANAGER

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Optimo V